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# WOULD YOU STOMP ON A PICTURE OF YOUR MOTHER? WOULD YOU KISS AN ICON?

Nicholas Wolterstorff

My aim in this essay is to understand why it is that we stomp on images of persons that we hate or dislike and kiss or light candles in front of images of persons that we love, honor, or admire. Far and away the most probing and intense discussion of the nature and significance of such actions was that which took place among the Byzantines in the so-called iconoclast controversy, from early in the eighth century until the middle of the ninth century. The bulk of my essay consists of identifying and analyzing the arguments developed in this period for and against icon veneration. After concluding that the Byzantines did not succeed in developing a plausible account of what goes on in icon veneration, I offer my own account of what is going on when someone kisses an icon or stomps on a picture of her mother.

Would you stomp on a picture of your mother? Not unless you hated her. In which case, you might.

“But it’s only a piece of paper. You’re not stomping on your mother.”

“It’s not just a piece of paper. It’s a picture of my mother. I loved my mother. Stomping on her picture is the last thing I would do.”

Why would one not stomp on a picture of one’s mother? What is it about stomping on a picture that makes it something one might do if one hated the person pictured but would refuse to do if one loved him or her? And why would one kiss an icon? Those are the questions I intend to reflect on in this essay. It goes without saying that my interest is not just in the actions I have mentioned but in certain more general types of which those actions are examples.

## *An Example From Fiction*

Let us have before us another example of the type of action that I will be analyzing. In his great novel *Silence*, the Japanese writer Shusaku Endo gives a somewhat fictionalized account of an episode in early-seventeenth-century Japan.<sup>1</sup> In the latter half of the preceding century the Jesuits, with the approval of the local authorities, had conducted mission work in Japan. They enjoyed considerable success; apparently several hundred

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<sup>1</sup>Shusaku Endo, *Silence*, trans. William Johnston (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1980).



thousand Japanese became Christians. Then, late in the sixteenth century, the Jesuits fell out of favor with the authorities and severe persecution set in, both of the Jesuits and of the local Christians. Gradually it became clear to the authorities that the mode of persecution being practiced was having the opposite effect from that intended; the Christian martyrs made Christianity more attractive to the Japanese people rather than less. So a new strategy was devised by the authority, Inoue. That is where the novel begins.

A young Jesuit, Sebastian Rodrigues, was on his way from Portugal with a student friend to serve as missionaries in Japan. During a brief stopover in India, they heard the rumor that Christovao Ferreira, a much admired teacher of theirs in Portugal who had preceded them by several years to the mission field in Japan, had apostatized. They found this not only deeply disturbing but incomprehensible. Eventually they landed on the shores of Japan, where they were taken in and hidden by local Christians. Soon they decided that it was best to separate; shortly thereafter, each was captured.

During his time of hiding, Sebastian heard from local Christians about the so-called torture of the pit: Christians were hung upside down over a pit of excrement until they recanted. One arm was left free to signal recantation; a small slit was made in the forehead, or behind the ears, so that blood could slowly drip out and prevent the victim from losing consciousness on account of the pooling of blood in the brain. Sebastian spent a good deal of his time in his cell rehearsing the mental and spiritual strategies he would use for resisting the temptation to apostatize when tortured.

Then one night his old teacher, Ferreira, obviously now a broken man, came to visit Sebastian in his cell. Yes, the rumor was true; he had apostatized. Ferreira insisted to Sebastian that he, Sebastian, would shortly do the same. Sebastian heard a noise outside his cell and assumed it was the guards snoring. No, it's not the guards, said Ferreira. It is the groans of Japanese Christians suffering the torture of the pit. You see, said Ferreira to Sebastian, *you* will not be tortured. It is your fellow Christians who are and will be tortured. They will be tortured within your earshot until you apostatize. Nothing else will stop their torture.

"Never," says Sebastian, "never will I apostatize."

Let me now quote Endo's own words. Since later on I will want to make use of various parts of the narration, let me quote at some length.

Until now Ferreira's words had burst out as a single breath of anger, but now his voice gradually weakened as he said: "Yet I was the same as you. On that cold, black night I, too, was as you are now. And yet is your way of acting love? A priest ought to live in imitation of Christ. If Christ were here . . ."

For a moment Ferreira remained silent; then he suddenly broke out in a strong voice: "Certainly Christ would have apostatized for them." . . .

"Christ would certainly have apostatized to help men."

"No, no!" said the priest, covering his face with his hands and wrenching his voice through his fingers. "No, no!"

"For love Christ would have apostatized. Even if it meant giving up everything he had."

"Stop tormenting me! Go away, away!" shouted the priest wildly. But now the bolt was shot and the door opened—and the white light of the morning flooded into the room.

"You are now going to perform the most painful act of love that has ever been performed," said Ferreira, taking the priest gently by the shoulder.

Swaying as he walked, the priest dragged his feet along the corridor. Step by step he made his way forward, as if his legs were bound by heavy leaden chains—and Ferreira guided him along. In the gentle light of the morning, the corridor seemed endless; but there at the end stood the interpreter and two guards, looking just like three black dolls.

"Sawano [Ferreira], is it over? Shall we get out the *fumie*!" As he spoke the interpreter put on the ground the box he was carrying and, opening it, he took out a large wooden plaque.

"Now you are going to perform the most painful act of love that has ever been performed," Ferreira repeated his former words gently. "Your brethren in the Church will judge you as they have judged me. But there is something more important than the Church, more important than missionary work: what you are now about to do."

The *fumie* is now at his feet.

A simple copper medal is fixed on to a grey plank of dirty wood on which the grains run like little waves. Before him is the ugly face of Christ, crowned with thorns and the thin, outstretched arms. Eyes dimmed and confused the priest silently looks down at the face which he now meets for the first time since coming to this country.

"Ah," says Ferreira. "Courage!"

"Lord, since long, long ago, innumerable times I have thought of your face. Especially since coming to this country have I done so tens of times. When I was in hiding in the mountains of Tomogi; when I crossed over in the little ship; when I wandered in the mountains; when I lay in prison at night. . . . Whenever I prayed your face appeared before me; when I was alone I thought of your face imparting a blessing; when I was captured your face as it appeared when you carried your cross gave me life. This face is deeply ingrained in my soul—the most beautiful, the most precious thing in the world has been living in my heart. And now with this foot I am going to trample on it."

The first rays of the dawn appear. . . . The priest grasps the *fumie* with both hands bringing it close to his eyes. He would like to press to his own face that face trampled on by so many feet. With saddened glance he stares intently at the man in the center of the *fumie*, worn down and hollow with the constant trampling. A tear is about to fall from his eye. "Ah," he says trembling, "the pain!"

"It is only a formality. What do formalities matter?" The interpreter urges him on excitedly. "Only go through with the exterior form of trampling."

The priest raises his foot. In it he feels a dull, heavy pain. This is no mere formality. He will now trample on what he has considered the most beautiful thing in his life, on what he has believed most pure, on what is filled with the ideals and dreams of man. How his foot aches! And then the Christ in

bronze speaks to the priest: "Trample! Trample! I more than anyone know of the pain in your foot. Trample! It was to be trampled on by men that I was born into this world. It was to share men's pain that I carried my cross."

The priest placed his foot on the *fumie*. Dawn broke. And far in the distance the cock crew.<sup>2</sup>

"It is only a formality. What do formalities matter? . . . Only go through with the exterior form of trampling."

"It's only a piece of paper. It's not your mother!"

But it wasn't just a formality. By trampling, Sebastian apostatized. He knew that he did; everybody knew that he did. He too lived the remainder of his life as a broken person.

We are touching here on something that our modern way of thinking about art, shaped as it is by the revolution in the arts that occurred in the early modern period and the eighteenth century, never takes note of: this is neither art as object of aesthetic contemplation, nor art as self-expression, nor art as revelatory of truth.

Recall what Sebastian does before he tramples. He "grasps the *fumie* with both hands, bringing it close to his eyes. He would like to press to his own face that face trampled on by so many feet." He would like to *kiss* the icon. Not everyone who would resist stomping on a picture would feel inclined to kiss the picture. Strong resistance to performing gestures of dishonor, with respect to an image of someone one loves or admires, can coexist with little or no impulse to perform gestures of honor. Though no Protestant would willingly stomp on a picture of Christ, most do not share in the Orthodox practice of venerating the icon of Christ. Why resistance to gestures of dishonor appears to be stronger than the impulse to gestures of honor is a topic that I will not be able to take up.

It is worth noting, however, that a good many of those Protestants who would never kiss an icon of Christ nevertheless give honored place in their homes to representations of Christ. Perhaps there is less disagreement among Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants than on the surface there appears to be. No doubt many secularists regard all of this behavior surrounding images of Christ as evidence that Christians have not outgrown magic. But they too would not stomp on pictures of those they love and admire. Are they crypto-believers in magic? And a good many people, religious or not, place photographs of deceased relatives in positions of honor in their homes; some, on occasion, light candles in front of them; a few, when no one is looking, kiss them. Evidently we are touching here on something deep and pervasive in our commerce with images.

### *Employing the Iconoclast Controversy For Our Purposes*

Far and away the most substantial body of reflection on the topic in hand emerged in the controversy over icons that wracked the Byzantine Empire for more than a century, from its first outbreak around 725 until it

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 69–171.

was finally officially laid to rest by the iconophile council of 843. Under pressure from the so-called *iconoclasts* (literally, destroyers of icons), the *iconophiles* (literally, lovers of icons) labored intensely to defend the propriety of venerating icons;<sup>3</sup> that required getting clear on just what it is that one does when one venerates an icon. Never before or since have the nature and propriety of venerating an image been so probingly explored. So I propose beginning our inquiry by looking at what the Byzantines had to say on the matter.<sup>4</sup>

I anticipate that some adherents of Orthodoxy will find offensive what I will be doing, namely, taking seriously and defending the main argument of the eighth century iconoclasts against an argument employed by the iconophiles in defense of icon veneration, and criticizing the attempt of the iconophiles to respond to that iconoclast argument. This feels to them like defiling holy ground. My response is though I will indeed be taking seriously and defending the argument of the iconoclasts and criticizing the arguments of the iconophiles, I will not be defending the iconoclast rejection of icon veneration. Instead, I will conclude my discussion with a defense of icon veneration, albeit a defense different from any of those proposed by the eighth century iconophiles.

After an initial period of considerable resistance to images of holy persons, the practice became rather common among Christians of composing images of Christ, of the Virgin, and of various saints. That was surprising, given the origins of Christianity in Judaism and given the intense hostility of early Christians to the practices of paganism. Bishop Epiphanius of Salamis (d. 403) expressed a common view when he declared, "Set up images, and you will see pagan customs do the rest."<sup>5</sup> Even more surprising was the emergence, in the last quarter of the seventh century, of the practice of *venerating* images of Christ, the Virgin, and the saints. A bit later, in the 720s, opposition to this novel practice of veneration began to surface.<sup>6</sup>

Our evidence as to the initial sources of opposition to icon veneration is very scanty. From the evidence we do have, one source of opposition is

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<sup>3</sup>The iconophiles were also called *iconodules*, servants of icons.

<sup>4</sup>I should emphasize that it is not icons themselves but the act of venerating icons that I will be discussing. Those who are interested in a contemporary philosophical account of icons should see the essay by Terence Cuneo, "If These Walls Could Speak: Icons as Vehicles of Divine Speech," in *Faith and Philosophy* 27:2 (April 2010), 123–142. Though Cuneo's analysis is focused on icons themselves rather than on the act of veneration, his analysis does have implications for how veneration is to be understood.

<sup>5</sup>Quoted by Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence* (Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994), 145.

<sup>6</sup>The most exhaustive treatment of these three developments is Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era c. 680–850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Not far behind is Belting, *Likeness and Presence*. See also Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999 revised edition); Ernst Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm," in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, VIII (1954); and Peter Brown, "A Dark Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy" in his collection, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1982).

clear, however. The Byzantine forces were suffering defeat after defeat at the hands of the Arab Muslims. God, so it was widely held, must be punishing the Chosen People for their sin. What might that sin be? What else could it be, some said, but the novel practice of venerating icons. Among the Muslims there was no such practice. Later, toward the end of the first third of the eighth century, the additional argument emerged that images of Christ are heretical.<sup>7</sup>

Iconoclasm was far from being a unified movement. There is no evidence that any of the iconoclasts were opposed to images in general. Some were opposed to images that were icons of holy figures; others were opposed only to icons of Christ. And whereas some may have been in favor of destroying icons, it's clear that others were not. On two points, however, the iconoclasts never wavered or disagreed over the course of the lengthy controversy. They uniformly held that icons of Christ were heretical; and they uniformly held that to venerate an icon is impermissible. (Some held that an icon placed high up where it could not be venerated by kissing, etc., was acceptable.) It is the second point, the rejection of veneration, that is relevant to our concerns here, since it was the arguments of the iconoclasts on this point that forced the iconophiles to develop a number of different theories of veneration.<sup>8</sup>

The extant writings of the iconoclasts are very few; the eventual winners of the controversy, the iconophiles, destroyed whatever iconoclast writings they could lay their hands on and altered some of the writings of the "fathers" that supported the position of the iconoclasts.<sup>9</sup> They also began to write what has been, until recently, the received history of the controversy.<sup>10</sup> We have to infer the views of the iconoclasts from the writings of their enemies, the iconophiles.

It is our good fortune, however, that in the course of developing their arguments the iconophiles often quoted at length from their opponents; from these quotations we can arrive at a fairly reliable understanding of the iconoclast position. Ironically, passages from the iconoclasts quoted

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<sup>7</sup>The controversy was far from being an academic discussion among intellectuals; it was caught up within intense struggles for power among multiple and ever-changing factions and within conflicting views as to how we human beings can gain access to the sacred. I will be ignoring this social, political, and religious context and focusing exclusively on the arguments. Brubaker and Haldon discuss the context extensively, with an extraordinarily judicious weighing of the evidence. I will also be ignoring the fact that miraculous powers were often ascribed to icons.

<sup>8</sup>It is not relevant to our purposes here to look at the charge of the iconoclasts that images of Christ were heretical.

<sup>9</sup>The iconoclasts were also guilty of altering texts.

<sup>10</sup>Brubaker and Haldon write, about the iconophile story of the controversy, that "until quite recently it has received, with a few caveats and some expressions of mistrust of the more extreme expressions of iconophile propaganda, general acceptance as a valid account of the eighth and early ninth centuries" (*Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 791). The last sentence of their book is this: "We hope that, if we have achieved nothing else, we can say convincingly that the iconophile version of the history of eighth- and ninth-century Byzantium has at last been laid to rest" (*ibid.*, 799).



by the iconophiles can sometimes be used to show that some of the charges lodged against the iconoclasts by the iconophiles, and repeated by many writers since, are base misinterpretations. The iconoclasts were not “despisers of matter.” They were neither crypto-Platonists nor crypto-gnostics. They were not anti-sacramental: they affirmed the importance of the Eucharist. They were not opposed to paying honor to Christ, the Virgin, and the saints. Most of them were not opposed to paying honor to relics of the saints.

As we shall see, the arguments for and against icon veneration that were developed in the eighth century were not always stated with the precision that you and I would wish; sometimes one has to guess at what a writer was getting at. Yet, so far as I know, there is no careful analysis and critique of the theories and arguments; all the discussions that I know of content themselves with summarizing the theories and arguments in a selection from the words of the writers.<sup>11</sup> I have no explanation for this state of affairs. What it means, however, is that there is no secondary literature with which to interact.

### *The Opening Argument*

The initial charge of the iconoclasts seems to have been—as one would expect—that veneration is idolatry. The response of the iconophiles was that one cannot tell, just from observing behavior, whether or not a person is engaged in idolatrous worship. One has to know the intention behind the behavior.<sup>12</sup> And as to the intention, John of Damascus quotes Leontius of Neapolis to the effect that “we do not worship as gods the figures and images of the saints. For if it is the wood of the image that we worship as God, then we would worship all other wood as well, and we would not throw the image into the fire when the picture fades, as we often do.”<sup>13</sup>

The two pieces of evidence that Leontius here offers for the acceptability of the iconophile intention seem to me not as decisive as John takes them to be. Nor is intention as decisive as John suggests it is for determining whether or not a person is engaging in idolatry. Sebastian’s intentions did not determine whether or not he had apostatized. But let these points pass. What is important for our purposes is the positive explanation and

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<sup>11</sup>Kenneth Parry, in *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996) offers a detailed presentation of iconophile thought; but there is no analysis and critique.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Leontius of Neapolis, quoted by John of Damascus in *On the Divine Images*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980): “when we Christians embrace the icons of Christ or an apostle, or a martyr, with a physical kiss, we give a spiritual kiss to Christ Himself, or His martyr. In any event, as I have always said, one must examine the intention of all embracings and all worship,” 99. And cf. Theodore of Studios: “Worship is unique, and belongs to God alone; but other kinds of veneration belong to others. We venerate kings and rulers, servants venerate their masters, children venerate their parents: but not as gods. Although veneration has the same outward form, it varies in intention” (*On the Holy Icons*, trans. Catharine P. Roth [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1981], 38).

<sup>13</sup>*On the Divine Images*, 98.



defense of icon veneration that John goes on to offer. He affirms a principle—let me call it *the principle of transference*—that he finds in several of his predecessors, in particular, Athanasius, Basil the Great, and John Chrysostom.

These and other writers often defended the veneration of icons by comparing it to the accepted practice of venerating images of the emperor and formulating what they took to be the principle involved in this practice.<sup>14</sup> Basil, with his eye on this practice, stated the principle thus: “the honor given to the image is transferred to the prototype.”<sup>15</sup> John Chrysostom characteristically made the point with more flamboyance: “Do you not know that if you insult the image of the emperor, you transfer the insult to the prototype? Do you not know that if you show contempt to his image, whether it is a wooden carving or a copper statue, you will be judged not for insulting lifeless matter, but for showing the emperor contempt? Dishonor shown to the emperor’s image is dishonor shown to the emperor himself.”<sup>16</sup> Basil speaks explicitly only of the transference of honor; Chrysostom speaks explicitly only of the transference of dishonor. I assume that both held that both are transferred.<sup>17</sup>

If the principle of transference were correct, we would want to know why it holds. What brings it about that honor and dishonor are transferred in this way? But let that pass. Suppose that honoring and dishonoring can get transferred from one entity to another in the manner required. It will never be the right kind of honoring that gets transferred.

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<sup>14</sup>Cf. the statement by the iconophile Council of Nicea of 787: “When the population rushes with candles and incense to meet the garlanded images and icons of the emperor, it does not do so to honor panels painted with wax colors, but to honor the emperor himself” (quoted in Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 102–103).

<sup>15</sup>Quoted in *On the Divine Images*, 36. The *horos* (definition) of the iconophile Council of Nicea of 787 quotes Basil’s principle and draws the obvious implication: “the honour to the icon is conveyed to the prototype. Thus he who venerates the icon venerates the hypostasis of the person depicted on it” (quoted in Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth Century Iconoclasm* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986], 179).

<sup>16</sup>Quoted in *On the Divine Images*, 68.

<sup>17</sup>One of the fullest statements of the principle of transference occurs in a declaration read by Epiphanius the Deacon, at the iconophile Council of Nicea of 787: “as we have just said, drawing upon the holy Fathers, the honour of the icon is conveyed to the prototype. When one looks at the icon of a king, he sees the king in it. Thus, he who bows to the icon bows to the king in it, for it is his form and his characteristics that are on the icon. And as he who reviles the icon of a king is justifiably subject to punishment for having actually dishonoured the king—even though the icon is nothing but wood and paints mixed and blended together with wax—so does he who dishonours the figure of any of these [saints] transfer the insult to him whose figure is [on the icon]. Even the very nature of things teaches that when an icon is dishonoured, it is certainly the prototype that is dishonoured” (Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 101). In a later declaration read by Epiphanius the Deacon, the insistence, expressed at the end of the above passage, that the principle is built into the nature of things, becomes even more emphatic: “For who does not know that when an icon is dishonoured the insult applies to the person who is depicted on the icon. The truth knows this to be so and the nature of things teaches it to be so. The Fathers also agree with this.” After quoting Basil, Athanasius, and Chrysostom, Epiphanius concludes, “These Fathers clearly followed what is natural” (Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 145).

Both the iconophiles and the iconoclasts consistently distinguished the type of honor appropriate to God and to Christ from that appropriate to saints; they called the former “worship” (*latreia*) and the latter “veneration” (*proskynesis*). They also spoke of venerating icons, however. Most of those who have written subsequently about icons have followed them in speaking thus; in preceding paragraphs I did so as well. What the Byzantines were referring to when they spoke of venerating an icon was the act of engaging the icon in such a way as thereby to worship Christ or venerate some saint. To engage an icon in that way is implicitly to treat the icon with a certain sort of honor; but it is obviously neither the sort of honor appropriate to Christ or to a saint. So as to avoid confusion, let me henceforth refrain from speaking of venerating an icon and instead speak of *veneratively engaging* an icon. To veneratively engage an icon is to engage it in such a way as thereby to worship Christ or venerate some saint.<sup>18</sup>

So consider an icon of Christ. If one worships the icon, then worship is indeed available for transference from icon to Christ, but one has fallen into idolatry. If one does not worship the icon but pays it the honor implicit in venerative engagement, then what is available for transference to Christ is a mode of honoring that falls far short of the worship that is due Christ. The counterpart point holds for icons of saints: the sort of honoring available for transfer is never the right sort of honoring. If it is of the right sort for an icon, it falls short of being of the right sort for a saint; if it is of the right sort for a saint, it exceeds being of the right sort for an icon.

*A Second Line of Defense against the Iconoclasts:  
The Likeness Theory of the Image*

When one turns from John of Damascus, who wrote in defense of the icons near the beginning of the iconoclast controversy, to Theodore of Studios, who wrote in defense after the controversy had raged for more than seventy-five years, one of the differences that strikes one is that, though Theodore cites the principle of transference, the principle no longer plays a role in his own argumentation. In characteristic Byzantine fashion he cites the principle in order to establish that the tradition is on his side—or more precisely, to establish that he is on the side of the tradition.<sup>19</sup>

From Theodore’s highly polemical discussion in *On the Holy Icons*, it’s clear why he does not employ the principle of transference in his own argumentation. The iconoclasts had launched an attack on the defense of

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<sup>18</sup>What I call “venerative engagement” was sometimes called “relative veneration” by the Byzantines.

<sup>19</sup>Theodore, in *On the Holy Icons*, speaks of the transference of honor in three passages, 28, 57–58, and 101. In the first two passages, he explicitly cites Basil; in the latter, he clearly alludes to Basil without citing him. He introduces his citations of Basil thus: “In the same way the divine Basil says . . .” “Let us here again listen to the holy Basil . . .” What he wants from Basil is support from the tradition for the conclusion that “the icon of Christ is also called ‘Christ,’ and there are not two Christs; nor in this case is the power divided, nor the glory fragmented” (57–58). References to Theodore’s *On the Holy Icons* will hereafter be incorporated into the text.

icon veneration offered by the principle of transference and that attack had touched a nerve. I know of no iconoclast text in which an iconoclast explains in his own voice why the principle of transference has to be rejected. But it's quite clear what Theodore took the argument of the iconoclasts to be; it's essentially the same as the argument against the principle that I offered above.

The iconoclasts discerned that the principle of transference implies that if Christ is to be appropriately honored by engaging with an icon of Christ, the mode of honor paid to the icon has to be identical with that paid to Christ, namely worship; so too, if some saint is to be appropriately honored by engaging with an icon of the saint, the mode of honor paid to the icon has to be identical with that paid to the saint, namely, veneration. The iconoclasts argued that this *thesis of the identity of honoring*, as I shall call it, is unacceptable. Given the difference between icons, on the one hand, and Christ and the saints, on the other, it is unacceptable to pay to icons the same mode of honor that we are to pay to Christ and to the saints.<sup>20</sup>

Let me quote a couple of passages from Theodore in which he states what he takes to be the objection of the iconoclasts to the thesis of the identity of honoring.

*An objection as from the iconoclasts: "If every thing which is made in the likeness of something else inevitably falls short of equality with its prototype, then obviously Christ is not the same as His portrait in regard to veneration. And if these differ, the veneration which you introduce differs also. Therefore it produces an idolatrous worship." (102)*

*An objection as from the iconoclasts: "If the image which is modeled on Christ shares His veneration, how can He Himself say, 'My glory I give to no other'? Therefore the image does not share the veneration. But if it does not share, then one must admit that it is venerated idolatrously, as a second kind of veneration is introduced for it." (107)*

Obviously one way to meet the attack of the iconoclasts on the thesis of the identity of honoring would be to give up the thesis, thereby also giving up the principle of transference. Theodore does not do this. While no longer appealing to the principle of transference, he continues to embrace the thesis of the identity of honoring. He now defends that thesis by developing a theory of the image. His claim will no longer be, as the principle of transference implies, that our mode of honoring the icon is the same as our mode of honoring its prototype; his claim will now be that our honoring has just one object, not two.

Might it be that the answer to our own question, why is it that we venerationally engage images, is to be found in a theory of the image? Might it be that if we had a better understanding of the nature of images we would

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<sup>20</sup>Theodore opens his discussion with these words: "The heretics say, 'Surely there is not just one veneration, if our piety is shown to have many objects of veneration by the erection of icons'" (*On the Holy Icons*, 20).

understand why one would not stomp on a picture of one's mother and why some people kiss icons?

In fact Theodore offers two distinct theories of the image, though without ever explicitly taking note of their difference. Let me call them *the likeness theory* and *the appearance theory*. The likeness theory holds that what we honor, when engaging an icon venerationally, is that single thing which is the likeness of the prototype; the appearance theory holds that what we honor is that single thing which is the prototype. Let's consider the former of these two theories first.

The likeness theory employs Aristotelian conceptuality and goes as follows. Everybody has a characteristic look, a certain *likeness*. A person's likeness belongs to the ontological category of *form*. As such, it is capable of being exemplified both by other persons and by entities that are not persons, such as paintings. Hypostases distinct from oneself can share one's likeness.

This sharing of a person's likeness happens, for example, when a child looks like one of his or her parents. The child bears the parent's likeness—sometimes to the extent that we say of the son that he is the “spittin’ image” of his father. One sees the look of the father upon viewing the son. In such cases, the image shares with the prototype not only the prototype's likeness but its essence as well: the essence of both the child and the parent is human nature. Such images Theodore calls “natural images.” In his words, “The natural image is identical both in essence and in likeness with that of which it bears the imprint” (100).

Icons, by contrast, are artificial images, sharing with their prototypes the likeness of the prototype but not its essence. The essence of the icon is wood; the essence of the saint whose likeness the icon bears is human nature. It is on account of the identity of likeness that, in spite of the diversity of essence, “the emperor's image is also called emperor, yet there are not two emperors” (109).

Theodore puts his likeness theory to use in his attempt to answer the iconoclast charge that the thesis of the identity of honoring is unacceptable because the honor appropriately paid to Christ or a saint is never the same as the honor appropriately paid to an image. The conclusion Theodore wants to reach is that “the image of Christ is not differently venerated from Christ Himself, but is venerated in the same way, as it has an exact resemblance and likeness to him” (105).<sup>21</sup> His argument for this conclusion is that “it is not the essence of the image which we venerate, but the form of the prototype which is stamped upon it, since the essence of the image is not venerable. Neither is it the material which is venerated” (103).

The argument will not do. If, when the icon is engaged venerationally, it is the *likeness* of the prototype, exemplified and discerned in the icon,

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<sup>21</sup>Cf. p. 106: “We speak of relation inasmuch as the copy is in the prototype; one is not separated from the other because of this, except by the difference of essence. Therefore, since the image of Christ is said to have Christ's form in its delineation, it will have one veneration with Christ, and not a different veneration.”

that is honored, then Theodore has secured singleness of honoring at the cost of its no longer being Christ and the saints who are honored but their likenesses—surely a most unsatisfactory outcome! The likenesses of the saints may be worthy of some degree of honor; but the saints themselves, those holy persons, are to be the focus of honor, not their likenesses. Theodore's ontology makes clear that identity of saint and likeness is out of the question. Christ and the saints are hypostases, substances; their likenesses are forms.

*A Third Line of Defense against the Iconoclasts:  
The Appearance Theory of the Image*

That was the likeness theory of the image. On the alternative theory of the image that one finds in Theodore, the *appearance theory* as I call it, the prototype *appears* in the icon. Not only is the form that is the likeness of the prototype exemplified in the icon. On account of the fact that the icon exemplifies the likeness of the prototype, the prototype itself—that particular hypostasis—*appears* there.<sup>22</sup> The icon constitutes an *appearance* of the prototype. Though “the essence of the image is not of a nature to be venerated,” says Theodore, “the one who is portrayed appears in it for veneration” (103).<sup>23</sup> Consequently, by looking at the icon and seeing the prototype's appearance there, one *sees* the prototype. “In the image Christ [is] plainly visible,” says Theodore (109). “The prototype [is] seen in the image” (105).<sup>24</sup> And more elaborately,

How could the identity of veneration not be preserved, gentlemen, in the case of Christ and His image, if indeed the image is the likeness of Christ and reveals Christ in itself? Surely it is well known and agreed by everyone that no one could see the countenance of one, let us say Luke, in the

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<sup>22</sup>I take this to be what Athanasius and Cyril are saying in passages that Theodore quotes, namely, that the prototype appears in the icon because the icon bears his likeness. Addressing the iconoclast, Theodore says, “You should have paid attention to what the confessor Athanasius says: ‘In the image [of the emperor] there is the idea (*eidos*) and form (*morphê*) of the emperor. . . . The emperor's likeness is unchanged in the image, so that who sees the image sees the emperor in it, and again who sees the emperor recognizes him to be the one in the image. . . . Who therefore adores the image adores in it also the emperor. For the image is the form of the latter and his idea.’” (I have used David Freedberg's translation of this passage from Athanasius on p. 392 of his *The Power of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).) Theodore continues as follows: “And to what the divine Cyril says: ‘Just as if someone should look at a well-painted image and be amazed by the appearance of the emperor, and because he is able to see in the picture everything which is visible in the emperor, should conceive a desire to see the emperor himself. To him the painting might well say, ‘He who has seen me has seen the emperor;’ and ‘I and the emperor are one, as far as likeness and accurate resemblance are concerned;’ and ‘I am in the emperor and the emperor is in me, according to the appearance of his form.’ For the painting fully conveys his appearance, and the appearance of the painting is preserved in him.’ If you had heeded these fathers, you could have understood that when Christ is venerated, His image is also venerated, because it is in Christ; and when His image is venerated, Christ is venerated, for He is being venerated in it” (Theodore, *On the Holy Icons*, 53).

<sup>23</sup>Cf. p. 54: “the material cannot participate in the veneration, although he who is depicted appears in it for veneration.”

<sup>24</sup>Theodore adds, “and the image [is] in the prototype.”

countenance of another, let us say Thomas. For likeness is shown in things which are exactly similar, not in things which differ from each other in their characteristic property. If, therefore, this is true, and he who has seen the image of Christ has seen Christ in it, we certainly must say that as the image of Christ has the same likeness, so also it has the same veneration as Christ. (106)

Upon first reading, it would seem that when it comes time for Theodore, in the conclusion of this passage, to utilize the alternative appearance theory of the image in defense of the propriety of venerative engagement with icons, he falls back on the likeness theory. "As the image of Christ has the same likeness," he says, "so also it has the same veneration as Christ" (106). But I judge that he has to be interpreted as speaking loosely here. His thought in the passage as a whole is that the saint appears in the icon *on account of* the fact that the icon displays the saint's likeness.

On the appearance theory, the propriety of kneeling before the icon, kissing it, and so forth, is that these are eminently appropriate ways of paying honor to a saint when one is seeing the saint. The principle was suggested by the *horos* of the Council of 787 when it said, "when we see this prophecy on an icon, that is, the Virgin holding in her arms Him to Whom she gave birth, how can we bear not to bow and kiss it? Who is so uninstructed in his thinking that he would not attempt to offer such an embrace?"<sup>25</sup>

It is worth noticing, incidentally, that Theodore does not say that the saint is *present in* the icon, nor does he say that to stand before the icon is to stand in *the presence of* the saint. What he says is that the saint *appears*, and that one *sees* the saint. It is customary for writers in our century to describe the Byzantines as holding that the prototype is present in the image. Some contemporary representatives of Orthodoxy also speak thus when expressing their own views. The iconophiles of the eighth and ninth centuries did not—not characteristically, anyway.<sup>26</sup> The saint, rather than being present in the icon, *appears* in the icon.

This second theory of the image opens up before us the large and complex issue of what constitutes an appearance of something—and the corresponding issue of the conditions under which one sees something. When I look straight at someone, then she appears to me and I, conversely, see her—provided that my eyesight is adequate and the lighting satisfactory, provided that she occupies a sufficiently large area within my visual field, provided that I am appropriately attentive, and so forth. Can she

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<sup>25</sup>Sahas, *Icon and Logos*, 174.

<sup>26</sup>Theodore affirms that divinity is, in a way, present in everything. Beyond that, it's present in an icon of Christ only in the sense that the icon is a likeness or appearance of that one whose flesh was united with divinity in a single hypostasis. In "the case of the icon," he says, "where there is present not even the nature of the flesh which is portrayed, but only its relationship, much less could you say that there is present the uncircumscribable divinity: which is located in the icon, and is venerated there, only insofar as it is located in the shadow of the flesh united with it" (33).



also appear to me, and can I see her, by looking at a reflective image of her in a mirror? If so, is there then any good reason for denying that she can also appear to me, and I can see her, by looking at a photographic image of her? And if that is not to be denied, is there then any good reason for denying that she can also appear to me, and I can see her, by looking at an artist's faithful rendering of her?

My use of the word "rendering" here is deliberate. There is a painting from Rembrandt's hand that he entitled *Bathsheba* and for which he used his wife, Hendrickje, as model. Our word "representation" is such that it would be correct to say that Rembrandt represented Bathsheba and also correct to say that he represented Hendrickje. But the relation of Rembrandt and of the painting to the representatum is very different in the two cases. As for Hendrickje, Rembrandt produced a rendering of her. Using her as model, he attempted to capture her characteristic look. Hendrickje functioned centrally in a species of guided making. Not so for Bathsheba. Rembrandt did not have the option of using her as a model and trying to capture her characteristic look. He did not have the option of trying to produce a rendering of her. He depicted her. Our word "representation" is ambiguous as between rendering and depicting.

When Rembrandt rendered Hendrickje there emerged from his hand, by way of a chain of intentions and causes, a painting that presents to us a likeness of Hendrickje. Analogues would be reflective and photographic images of Hendrickje—the crucial difference being that in these latter cases, the likeness is produced without the intervention of human intentional action. Those of us who have developed theories of representation in recent years have almost always had depiction in mind, seldom, rendering. Why that is so, is a good question.

The Byzantines always had rendering in mind when discussing icons; depiction did not enter their thought. Theodore remarks, "What we call 'circumscribed' is simply that which is a prototype. For that which is circumscribed can serve as a model for the image which is drawn as a copy" (47–48). This is the language appropriate to renditions. As is this: "everyone who is portrayed in a painting is copied from the form of the prototype" (48). The fact that the Byzantines had renditions rather than depictions in mind is what accounts for its seeming plausible to them to hold that, in looking at the icon of some saint, the saint appears to one and one sees the saint. Nobody thinks that when I look at Rembrandt's *Bathsheba* painting, Bathsheba appears to me and I see Bathsheba. It is not patently implausible to suppose that Hendrickje appears to me and that I see Hendrickje.

You and I are ready to jump in with an objection: rendition, unlike depiction, requires a chain of intention and causation linking prototype and image. But there was no such chain between Christ and the icons of Christ, nor between the Virgin and her icons; probably in most cases there was also no such chain between the saints and their icons. So whatever may be the merits of Theodore's appearance theory of the image, and its attendant



defense of venerative engagement of icons, it is irrelevant to the icons that the Byzantines actually had. Warner Sallman, working in Minnesota in the late 1930s, produced a well-known image of Christ. Since it was only a depiction, not a rendition, it is out of the question that, in looking at it, one sees Christ.

The Byzantines would contest the central assumption of our objection. Prominent in Byzantine culture were stories concerning the origins of their icons.<sup>27</sup> The original images of Christ were said to be pieces of cloth that had touched his face or that he had miraculously produced; the original image of the Virgin was said to have been painted by St. Luke; and the original images of the saints were said to have been renderings of them. All other icons were said to be copies of these, copies of copies, and so forth. In short, the Byzantines would have rejected our claim that their icons were depictions, not renditions.

These claims, concerning the origin of their icons, continue to be affirmed by Orthodox theologians to this day. In his *Theology of the Icon*, the twentieth-century Orthodox theologian Leonid Ouspensky remarks that painting an icon "is not only a matter of transmitting an image consecrated by tradition, but above all of preserving a direct and living link with the person whom the icon represents."<sup>28</sup> In order to avoid "a break between the image and its prototype, iconographers use old icons and manuals as models. The ancient iconographers knew the faces of the saints as well as they knew those of their close relatives. They painted them either from memory or by using a sketch or a portrait. . . . [O]nce a person had acquired a reputation of holiness, an image was made of him to distribute among the faithful immediately after his death."<sup>29</sup> Ouspensky concedes that these claims "cannot be substantiated with scholarly proofs, but they reflect the very meaning of Christianity, which implies that the image is its organic and primordial expression. Without images, Christianity is no longer Christianity. That is why the existence of the sacred image, according to the teaching of the Church, dates back to the very beginning of Christianity."<sup>30</sup>

### *Response to the Third Line of Defense*

The issues are intriguing. Is it true that, when looking at reflective or photographic images of a person, or at renditions, the person appears to us and we see the person? It served the purposes of the Byzantines to highlight the similarity between, on the one hand, looking at images and renditions of a person and, on the other hand, looking directly at the person. In all such cases one sees for oneself how the person looked. One

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<sup>27</sup>For examples, see Chapter 4 in Hans Belting's *Likeness and Presence*.

<sup>28</sup>Leonid Ouspensky *Theology of the Icon* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1978), 196.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 109–110

enjoys “intuitional” access to the person’s likeness. But there is also a fundamental difference that the Byzantines chose not to highlight.

When looking directly at a person, my perception of the person is *immediate*—in the sense that I do not perceive the person *by way of* perceiving something else. By contrast, when I look at an image or rendition of someone, it’s that image or rendition that is the immediate object of my perception, not the person. If, in such cases, I nonetheless perceive the person, that perception is *mediated* by my *immediate* perception of images or renditions that are related to the person by a chain of causation, or by a chain of causation plus belief and intention. Does that difference have the consequence that one sees a person only by looking directly at him or her—not by looking at reflective or photographic images of them, and also not by looking at painted renditions?

If that difference does not have that consequence, does some other difference have that consequence? Reflective images of a person come and go with the presence of the person in the region; renditions and photographic images abide. Does that difference have the consequence that one can see a person by looking at a reflective image of the person but not by looking at a rendition or photographic image?

Human beliefs and intentions are involved in the production of painted renditions in a way in which they are not involved in the production of photographs. Does that difference have the consequence that one can see somebody by looking at mechanically produced images of her but not by looking at a rendition of her?<sup>31</sup>

In short, in the series going from looking directly at the person herself, to looking at a reflective image of her, to looking at a photographic image, to looking at a rendition, where do *appearance* and *seeing* cease? Or do they not cease? (We could, of course, also insert television images into the series.) Perhaps our concepts of *appearing* and *seeing* are such that these questions have no decisive answers. If that is so, then which are the substantive issues here and which are the merely verbal issues?

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<sup>31</sup>It’s this last option that Kendall Walton defends in “Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism,” in *Critical Inquiry*, December 1984. It’s a strange defense, however. “In order to see through the picture to the scene depicted,” says Walton, “the viewer must have visual experiences which do not depend on the picture maker’s beliefs in the way that paintings do” (264). Why is this? The differences Walton points to between photographs and paintings are real enough; but how do we get from there to the conclusion that we can see a person by looking at a photograph of him but not by looking at a portrait? Walton deprives himself of any defence of his claim by announcing that he doesn’t really care whether it is our ordinary concept of *seeing* that he is using when he claims that we can see things by looking at photographs of them but not by looking at portraits. He says, “My claim is that we see, quite literally, our dead relatives themselves when we look at photographs.” He then asks, “Does this constitute an extension of the ordinary English sense of the word ‘see’?” And he answers, “I don’t know; the evidence is mixed. But if it is an extension, it is a very natural one” (252). Then later, after conceding that we do speak of seeing Henry VIII upon looking at a portrait, he says that “Our use of the word ‘see,’ by itself, proves nothing” (253). So what then is Walton actually claiming when he announces that “We do not see Henry VIII when we look at his portrait; we see only a representation of him” (253)?

Theodore's theory of images opens up vast vistas for exploration. For the purposes at hand, however, it's not necessary to enter that terrain; best then on this occasion not to do so. Theodore wanted to explain and legitimate the practice of venerative engagement with icons. We want to understand what, in general, we are doing when we engage certain objects veneratively and why we do this. Why does this practice exist? And why are we reluctant to stomp on pictures of those we love? Theodore's second theory of the image, the appearance theory, doesn't help us.

Here's why. Would Sebastian have felt free to trample on the *fumie* if he had believed it was only a depiction of Christ, not a rendition? Surely not. Do those Protestants who believe that Sallman's *Head of Christ* is only a depiction and not a rendition feel free to stomp on it? Surely not. Had the Byzantines found themselves no longer believing the stories concerning the origins of their icons, would their practice of venerative engagement with the icons have died out? I doubt it.

Conversely, the appearance theory of the image, and its complementary account of veneration, would, if true, exact from us far more venerative engagement than any of us could manage. The theory says that when looking at a reflective or photographic image of someone, or at a rendition, one sees that person—and the complementary account adds that what accounts for, and legitimates, our engaging of images and renditions with gestures of honor or dishonor is that such gestures are naturally appropriate to seeing the person. But nowadays all of us are surrounded with far too many images and renditions of those we love and hate for this to be the explanation of our kissing and stomping. We would be kissing and stomping all the time. One sometimes takes whole stacks of photographs of those one loves and consigns them to the flames. There are just too many. In doing that, one is not dishonoring those persons. The Byzantines had very few images in their surroundings. In their situation, Theodore's account had some plausibility; in ours, it has none.

The two theories of the image propounded by Theodore, the likeness theory and the appearance theory, do not exhaust the field of theories of images. But if I refuse to stomp on a picture of my mother while happily consigning to the flames some of my superfluity of photographs of her, then it is hard to see how any theory of the image is going to answer our questions. Theories of the image will not do for us the work required. We have to look in some other direction altogether from those in which the Byzantines looked.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>David Freedberg, in *The Power of Images*, devotes a chapter to the venerative engagement with icons and the resistance to such engagement. His argument is that though a number of distinct factors are to be discerned at work in veneration, almost always there is "the more or less easy elision of image and prototype" (414). This is essentially Theodore's appearance theory, with one important difference. The term "elision" suggests confusion; Theodore would resist the suggestion that venerative engagement with icons involves some sort of confusion.

### *Is Self-expression the Clue?*

Should we perhaps execute the characteristically modern move of looking inside the agent? Might *self-expression* be the clue? Is the person who stomps on a picture of her mother thereby expressing her hatred for her mother? Is the person who kisses the icon of a saint thereby expressing his love of the saint?

Very often, Yes. Which leads to the next question, *Why?* Why is it that when the cleaning lady dusts the icon, scrapes off the smoke-blackened wax, and straightens it, she is expressing her regard for the icon, whereas when she kisses it, bows before it, or lights a candle before it, she is expressing her regard for the saint (and for the icon as well)? Could she express her regard for the saint with the former gestures? Could she express her regard for the icon with the latter gestures?

In many cases, however, expression of feelings is not what is taking place. Return once again to Sebastian. Was Sebastian expressing his negative feelings for Christ when he trampled on the *fumie*—or, to preserve the delicate ambiguity of Endo's narration, when he "placed his foot" on the *fumie*? Surely not. Sebastian had no such negative feelings to express; he felt nothing but love for Christ. It was when he took the *fumie* in his hands and brought it close to his face that he was expressing his feelings for Christ.

Conversely, someone might kiss an icon of a saint, bow before it, or light a candle before it, without thereby expressing any feelings of honor or love for the saint. He might just be going through the motions. Or, like Sebastian, he might be acting under duress, forced to perform the gestures of veneration while in fact feeling nothing but disgust for the saint or believing firmly that there never was any such saint. He would then be acting insincerely. But it is the possibility of insincerely performing the gestures of venerative engagement that highlights the fact that self-expression is not the clue we are looking for. (Incidentally, part of the genius of Endo's narration is that though in Sebastian's case there is discrepancy between feeling and action, nonetheless it would not be correct to say that Sebastian acted insincerely in stepping on the icon.)

If self-expression explains anything about Sebastian's placing his foot on the *fumie*, it explains his reluctance to do so; his true feelings were behind that reluctance. But what was the connection? Since Sebastian had only positive feelings toward Christ, he could not have expressed negative feelings by stepping on the *fumie*. Why then the reluctance?

### *A Suggestion*

It's time for me to offer my own suggestion. I suggest that we reject the assumption, embraced by the iconophiles in response to the attack by the iconoclasts, that when an icon is engaged venerationally, there is just one thing that is being honored. The prototype is being honored, of course; but so too, implicitly, is the icon. I suggest that we also reject the principle

of transference, however, and the thesis of the identity of honoring implied by the principle. When one venerationally engages an icon of Christ or of some saint, the sort of honor that one pays to Christ or to the saint is distinctly different from the honor that one implicitly pays the icon. The iconoclasts were right to press this point.

The principle of transference did get one thing right, however. It implied that the clue to why it is appropriate to kiss an icon is to be found in the relation between the act of kissing the icon and the act of honoring the prototype. Though the principle was mistaken in what it claimed that relation to be, it was correct in its assumption that the answer to our questions lies in understanding that relation. It is to a theory of action rather than to a theory of images that we must look for an answer to our questions.

The relation between treating an icon a certain way and treating its prototype a certain way is the relation of one act *counting as* another. One's act of kissing some icon *counts as* one's performance of the other distinct act of paying honor to the person represented; *by* kissing the icon, one venerates the saint.<sup>33</sup> So too, one's act of stomping on some image *counts as* one's performance of the other distinct act of paying dishonor to the person represented; *by* stomping on the image, one pays dishonor to the person represented. Sebastian became a broken person because he realized that *by* performing the act of stepping on the *fumie* he performed that other distinct act of apostatizing. He realized that his act of stepping on the *fumie* counted *as* his apostatizing.

There were and are other ways of performing the act of apostatizing; conversely, it is possible to step on an icon of Christ without thereby apostatizing. The connection between the two acts is contingent. It was by virtue of a convention that was in effect that Sebastian's act of stepping on the *fumie* counted as his apostatizing. So too, there were and are other ways of paying honor to a saint than by kissing an icon of the saint, just as, conversely, it is possible to kiss the icon of a saint without thereby performing the act of honoring the saint. It is by virtue of a convention that is in effect among the Orthodox that kissing an icon of a saint counts as venerating the saint. When the icon is kissed, it is the saint that is venerated, not the icon; there's a singleness of veneration (though, since a certain sort of honoring of the icon is implicit in venerative engagement, not a singleness of honoring).

Our attempt to understand what goes on in kissing icons and stomping on pictures has taken us away from theories of the image, away also from the role of self-expression, to the phenomenon of one act counting as another. The clue we've been looking for lies in the relation that holds between two acts when a person's performing one member of the pair *counts as* the person's performing the other member. Here I must forego

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<sup>33</sup>I am assuming that the act of kissing some icon is distinct from the act of paying honor to the person represented. The assumption is controversial, however. Those who disagree will want to state what I am getting at differently from how I have stated it.

an analysis of this relation and trust that if the reader does not already have a grasp of the concept sufficient for the purposes at hand, a few additional examples will do the trick.<sup>34</sup> The examples I choose will also serve to show, once again, that images and self-expression are not at the heart of the matter.

The members of the military salute as the flag passes by. They “salute the colors.” By performing that act, they perform the other and distinct act of paying honor to their country. The flag is obviously not an image. And those who salute the colors may or may not, in their heart of hearts, hold their country in honor; they may or may not be expressing their own feelings of patriotism. No matter. Their saluting the colors *counts as* their paying honor to their country. In this case, too, it is by virtue of a convention which is in effect that the act of saluting the flag counts as honoring the country.

The son stomps on a relic from his father—a familiar jacket, perhaps. The jacket is not an image; it’s a relic. His stomping on the jacket *counts as* his paying dishonor to his father. In this case, too, it does so on account of a convention which is in effect; we all know what stomping on something means in that sort of situation. In stomping on the jacket, the son may or may not be expressing negative feelings toward his father. Normally that would be the case; the son feels anger toward his father and expresses that anger by stomping on his father’s familiar jacket. But the son may have acted under duress. Feeling nothing but affection for his father, only with extreme reluctance and great sorrow does he finally do what his tormenters force him to do, namely, pay dishonor to his father by stomping on his father’s jacket.

Instead of honoring a saint by kissing an icon of the saint, one can do so by uttering words of praise. It appears to me that there is something much more powerful about honoring a saint by kissing an icon of the saint than by uttering words of praise for the saint; that difference, so I suggest, goes a considerable way towards accounting for the passions aroused in the iconoclast controversy. Likewise, there was something much more powerful about forcing Sebastian to apostatize by trampling on the icon than forcing him to do so by uttering or inscribing some words. The greater power in both cases has to do, I think, with the fact that one’s body is more fully engaged. The Orthodox venerate the saints not just verbally but bodily; Sebastian apostatized with his body.<sup>35</sup> It would be worth exploring this point at some length.

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<sup>34</sup>Those who want an analysis should consult Chapter 5, “What it is to Speak,” of my *Divine Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>35</sup>Some years ago, Sinéad O’Connor, on the television program *Saturday Night Live*, rather dramatically tore up a photograph of the Pope. Her action evoked a storm of protest. My own guess is that the protest would have been far less intense if she had just said, “I hate the Pope.” I think the clue to the difference lies in the fact that she declared her hatred not just with her tongue but with her body.



*Fittingness*

These observations about the role of the body lead naturally to a related issue. Obviously the son does not regard any action whatsoever as a candidate for the means whereby he pays dishonor to his father. So what leads him to choose as he does? What leads him to pick stomping on a jacket of his father? The answer is that he chooses from among those actions that bear a certain *fittingness* to the act of paying dishonor, a certain *appropriateness*. A number of other actions would have fitted as well; but picking up his father's jacket and tenderly kissing it would not have fitted.

In general, beneath the conventions for counting-as that exist and hold in one's society, and beneath the resolutions formed on an individual basis, one can often discern a certain fittingness or propriety between the generating action and the generated action. Seldom is this the case for language. There is no fittingness between uttering the sentence "It's raining" and asserting that it's raining; the connection is purely a matter of convention. But apart from language, often the convention or resolution that accounts for one action counting as another amounts to the social canonization of a certain natural fittingness. Gestures have inherent expressive qualities; by virtue of those expressive qualities, some fit better with paying honor and others fit better with paying dishonor. Kissing fits better with paying honor; punching or kicking fits better with paying dishonor. Kissing as a way of paying honor and declaring affection is, of course, a convention among us—one can easily imagine a society in which no such convention existed. But it's not arbitrary. It represents the social canonization of a certain natural fittingness.

*Going Proxy*

I have argued that the clue to what is going on in the venerative engagement of icons lies in the relation between the act of veneratively engaging the icon and the act of venerating the saint represented: one's performance of the former act counts as one's performance of the latter. But something more needs to be said. What is the image doing in all this? Be it granted that the phenomenon of one *act* counting as another *act* is fundamental here; nonetheless, the image plays an important role of some sort. What is that role? What is the role of the icon when one venerates a saint by kissing an icon of the saint? What is the role of the photograph when one pays dishonor to one's mother by stomping on a photograph of her? What was the role of the *fumie* when Sebastian apostatized by placing his foot on it?

It will be clear from the foregoing that the fact that the icon is a rendition is not of decisive significance; a depiction would serve as well. Indeed, a relic would serve as well; it need not be an image of any sort whatsoever. Recall our example of the son stomping on a relic of his father. And it need not even be a relic. Burning or stomping on the "Stars and Stripes" is a way of declaring disgust for the United States; but the flag is neither image nor relic. Best to call it a symbol. And even this does not exhaust the



possibilities. Recall once again the angry son. He may find himself with neither photographs nor relics from his father. In that situation, he may grab a piece of his own clothing, throw it on the ground, declare as he does so, *Let this be my father*, and then stomp on it.

"*Let this be my father.*" The arbitrarily chosen piece of clothing *stands in* for his father. So too, I suggest, the photograph stands in for one's mother, the icon for the saint, the flag for the country. The function of the image is to *stand in* for the person represented.

How are we to understand this phenomenon of *standing in for*? It's the same as *going proxy for*—as when a glove went proxy for the absent partner in the old Dutch arrangement that enabled people to get married by proxy. And this, in turn, is but a special case of that even more general phenomenon which occurs in dramatic productions, in children's games of make-believe, and so forth, of something functioning *as a prop*.<sup>36</sup>

The vista that opens up before us is the whole terrain of one thing *going proxy for* another, or in some other way *serving as prop for* something. Even without exploring that terrain, it seems obvious why images and relics of persons are so readily made to go proxy for those persons. What takes one aback is that a glove can go proxy for an absent partner in a marriage ceremony, and that the son's own jacket can go proxy for his absent father. But so it is.

I have saved for last that rather strange thing which is the American Pledge of Allegiance. The moment for the pledge comes. Everyone rises, faces the flag, places right hand over heart, and recites a pledge that begins with the words, "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands." Are Americans flag-venerators? Not really, not most of them, anyway—any more than the Byzantines were icon-venerators. It is to their republic that Americans pledge allegiance, by way of imprecise words but fitting gestures.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>For an account of what it is for something to function as a prop, see Chapter 5 of my *Works and Worlds of Art* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1980). For an alternative account of the phenomenon, see Kendall Walton, *Mimesis and Make-Believe*.

<sup>37</sup>I take Leonid Ouspensky's *Theology of the Icon* to be an authoritative statement of how twentieth-century Orthodox theologians think of the icons. Ouspensky spends no time explaining and defending the veneration of icons; the topic that was at the center of the eighth-century controversy has no interest for him. His interest is exclusively in the icons themselves and in the practice of producing them.